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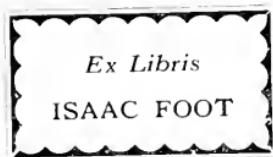
I R I S H R Y

BY JOSEPH CAMPBELL

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IRISH R Y

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE GILLY OF CHRIST

THE MOUNTAINY SINGER

MEARING STONES:

Illustrated by the Author

JUDGMENT, A PLAY

I R I S H R Y

BY JOSEPH CAMPBELL

III

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IN MEMORIAM

W. H. C.

B. 1842, D. 1900

P R E F A C E

HARDLY a corner of Ireland but has contributed something to this pageant of the types that stand for the nation to-day. Tipperary gave me *The Horse-Breaker*; Kerry, *The Mother* and *The Blind Man at the Fair*; Clare, *The Dancer*, *The Fiddler* and *The Bone-Setter*; Sligo, *Riders*; Galway, *The Aran Islander*; the mountainous borderland between the counties of Dublin and Wicklow, *The Turf-Man*, *The Labourer* and *The Woman at the Well*; Donegal, *The Journeyman Weaver*; Down, *The Whelk-Gatherer*; Armagh, *The Unfrocked Priest*; and Antrim, *The Orangeman*.

Artists are fortunate in that the colour of Irish life is still radiant. One hears on all sides of greyness, emigration, degeneracy, but one has only to look about to see that the cry has no mouth. There is blood everywhere; in the boglands of Connacht, as well as on the farms of Leinster; in the streets of Cork, as well as in that barbarous nook, Belfast, my own calf-ground.

The majority of the poems are printed for the first time, but a few have appeared in *The Irish Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry* (Chicago), and *The Irish-American* (New York), and my thanks are due the respective Editors for permission to republish.

J. C.

GLANCULLEN, CO. DUBLIN,
October, 1913.

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*A fair field, full of folk, I found there between,
Of all manner of men, the mean and the rich,
All working or wandering, as the world requires.*

—*Langland's Vision of Piers the Plowman.*

*Like Langland in his Vision, I
See a field of folk go by :
Shepherd, plougher, pensioner,
Scholar, priest and labourer.
Symbols of the god in man
Since the tale of time began.*

*Ireland is the field they tread.
Back of them the royal dead,
Heroes of an older day,
March in companies of grey—
Miledh in his battle-car,
Father to the kings that are ;
Conor, Feargus, Cullan's Hound,
Soundless on a tide of sound ;
Luai's daughter, Naisi's queen,
Loved and lover all unseen,
Save by me who look with eyes
Conscious of the mysteries.*

THE MOTHER

THE hearthstone broods in shadow,
And the dark hills are old,
But the child clings to the mother,
And the corn springs in the mould.

And Dana moves on Luachra,
And makes the world anew :
The cuckoo's cry in the meadow,
The moon, and the early dew.

THE SHEPHERD

DARK against the stars
He stands : the cloudy bars
Of nebulæ, the constellations ring
His forehead like a king.

The ewes are in the fold :
His consciousness is old
As his, who in Chaldæa long ago
Penned his flock, and brooded so.

THE PLOUGHMAN

THE ploughman ploughs the
fallow—

Smoking lines
Of sunset earth
Against a clump of pines.

A flock of rooks and seagulls
Wheel and cry
About him, making music
In the sky.

Wings black and silver
In a sky of grey,
Like shadows folding
Between night and day.

Thro' the pine-branches
Lights a dying gleam :
The swingle creaks,
The ploughman turns his team

Not for himself he ploughs
The hill land thro':
He offers sacrifice
For me and you.

Of earth, that in its time
Will break to bread,
The sacramental veil
Of Godlihead.

THE BLIND MAN AT THE FAIR

O to be blind !

To know the darkness that I know.
The stir I hear is empty wind,
The people idly come and go.

The sun is black, tho' warm and kind,
The horsemen ride, the streamers blow
Vainly in the fluky wind,
For all is darkness where I go.

The cattle bellow to their kind,
The mummers dance, the jugglers throw,
The thimble-rigger speaks his mind—
But all is darkness where I go.

I feel the touch of womankind,
Their dresses flow as white as snow ;
But beauty is a withered rind,
For all is darkness where I go.

Last night the moon of Lammas shined,
Rising high and setting low ;
But light is nothing to the blind—
All, all is darkness where they go.

White roads I walk with vacant mind,
White cloud-shapes round me drifting slow,
White lilies waving in the wind—
And darkness everywhere I go.

THE FARMER

YOU poets cannot know the earth as I.
The birth you know, but not the agony
Of travail ; harvest, but not seeding ;
Altar bread, but not the bleeding
Hands, the sweat, the press of thought
That, like a coulter, ploughs me thro'
Before the living germ is bought,
And swallows whistle in the windy blue.

THE WOOD-GATHERER

SH^E totters from the wood
Draggled and grey :
The winter of decay
Sets in her blood.

And yet on bush and tree
The leaf is out :
The cuckoo's been about
Two weeks or three.

Oh, what has frosty blood
To do with spring ?
Or fire with such a thing
As wood, green wood ?

THE COBBLER

By window-light and candle-light,
Making brogues for mortals' feet,
For hedgers and for gentlemen,
The cobbler keeps his little seat.
This sole will climb to find the Well
That flows over the Edge of Day,
And that in labour or in lust
Will wear its newness quite away.

Thro' half a yard of fury pane
And horn-rimmed moons of flinty glass,
Lifting his white and grimy cheek,
He sees the coloured seasons pass.
And tho' he never tastes the air
Or drinks the beauty of the sun,
He bows his back to work again
As if he were but just begun.

Red carts may come and riders go,
And sail-ships sail the windy sea,
Tinkers may tramp the roads of Clare
And captains fight in Carribbee ;
But window-light and candle-light,
Winter dark and summer sweet,
Careful as a leprechaun
The cobbler keeps his little seat.

THE DANCER

THE tall dancer dances
With slowly-taken breath :
In his feet music,
And on his face death.

His face is a mask,
It is so still and white :
His withered eyes shut,
Unmindful of light.

The old fiddler fiddles
The merry “ *Silver Tip* ”
With softly-beating foot
And laughing eye and lip.

And round the dark walls
The people sit and stand,
Praising the art
Of the dancer of the land.

But he dances there
As if his kin were dead :
Clay in his thoughts,
And lightning in his tread.

THE FIDDLER

WHAT spells are on his fiddle
Only the like of me knows,
That turned the Plough in heaven
And pulled the flower that grows
In Cluain-na-Marbh. Darkly
He blinks there and plays,
And no one of the dancers
But I can give him praise.

He fiddles out of the wave
And he fiddles out of fire;
In his hand hate and cunning,
On his strings the heart's desire.
And only I can praise
That know the dreamer's mind,
That have eyes for his darkness
And hear things on the wind.

RIDERS

BLUE cloud and amber,
And a moon riding high.
What is that coming
Out of the quiet sky ?

A cloud it seems, moving
All in the distance dim :
A red cloud moving
Over the hills' rim.

Nearer it comes, nearer,
A cloud red and white,
As Zechary the Prophet
Saw by dead of night.

Red horses racing,
And on their backs low,
Seven men riding,
And shouting as they go.

Then like the Lord's Prophet
I said, What are these ?
And no sound answered
But the leaves of the trees.

The leaves of the alders
Swaying to and fro,
And the wind of the riders
Shouting as they go.—

A star stooped down to me
When the cloud was past,
And said, Saw you riders
Riding very fast ?

Those were dealers
Riding from the fair
Against the morrow's sun
To Dromahair.

THE FAIRIES

WHEN Eber came to Kerry,
When Guaire gave his gold,
Then were we young and merry
Who now are old.

The green and the grey places,
Then were they green and grey :
We saw but shining faces
And open day.

We saw but shining faces,
The sickle moon of night,
Banners in royal places
And torches bright.

We heard but beauty spoken,
Red war and passion sung,
Music on harp-strings broken,
When we were young.

What is the morning plougher
To us, whose ancient dream
Is as a fallen flower
Upon a stream ?

THE GOMBEEN

BEHIND a web of bottles, bales,
Tobacco, sugar, coffin nails
The gombeen like a spider sits,
Surfeited ; and, for all his wits,
As meagre as the tally-board
On which his usuries are scored.

The mountain people come and go
For wool to weave or seed to sow,
White flour to bake a wedding cake,
Red spirits for a stranger's wake.
No man can call his soul his own
Who has the Devil's spoon on loan.

And so behnd his web of bales,
Horse halters, barrels, pucaun sails
The gombeen like a spider sits,
Surfeited ; and, for all his wits,
As poor as one who never knew
The treasure of the early dew.

THE OFFICIAL

THE rosewood chair,
The littered desk, the weary air—
What matter they ?
The tiller's spade that breaks the clay
In Wisdom's eye is worthier. No !
You could not make a leaf to grow,
For all you ponder so.

Young men will love, and mate
The flesh that fate
Has married ; wombs will open ; death
Will take the quiet breath
Of old people ; the harrowed seed
Will germinate, and give us bread at need ;
The apple-tree upon its root
Will carry golden fruit ;
The wind will rise,
And shake the heavy skies
To shapes of beauty ; sun
Will shine, rain fall, white water run,
And dew
Drop from the starlit firmament
In spite of Government
Or you !

LOAFERS

IF highest Heaven were no more
Than this: an undulating floor
Of flowering furze and lawny grass;
White clouds, like ships, that pass and pass;
An April sun warming my neck;
Two corbies playing at pick-a-back;
A lark trilling, a butterfly
That mounts and falls and flutters by;
My Thoreau open at "*Walden Pond*";
Blue hills of mystery beyond—
'Twould be enough. Or, having this,
Who'd die to win more perfect bliss?

And who's the wiser? I, or he
Who props a wall at Eden Quay,
And spits innumerably between
His drinks? while April like a queen
Rides over noisome lane and street,
Bringing the breath of meadow-sweet,
Of flowering furze and daffodils
That toss their beauty to the hills,
Of wall-flowers, purple, brown and red,
And Solomon's-seal with drooping head,—
And Liffey's ooze meanders rank,
For all her touch, 'twixt bank and bank.

Heaven is peace. The key is found
In sightless air, unheeded sound,

Or such like atrophy of sense
When consciousness is in suspense :
The climbing thoughts lulled to a sleep
Of grey forgetfulness, like sheep
Gathered to fold : when near is blent
With distant, and the skyey tent
Of clouds and trilling larks and sun
And earth and wind and God are one.
He's even wise, who props a wall,
And cares not if it stand or fall !

THE LABOURER

SHOUTS, loud and drunken, break the mood
Of a June night—the solitude,
The smell, the mystery; and soon
Their cause staggers against the moon.

Who, then, or what? A labourer:
Delver in earth, but now on air
Treading, as if the sky were his,
Zeus, and his starry mistresses!

Clodhopper, hireling: not content
With the bothy built by Government—
Two rooms, a sty—but he must drown
All memory of it in the town.

Ploughed earth is drab, but Camden Street
Is drabber: nothing clean or sweet:
No stars, no silences, no dews,
But pubs, and tick-shops run by Jews.

Here the strong man on holiday—
'Tis Corpus Christi—drinks his pay
With spongery at a spewy bar,
The bull-runter, the tramp, the tar.

And late returning, halo-crowned,
With empty purse and sorrow drowned,
Bawls to the stars that silently
Spin in the shining Milky Way.

THE TURF-MAN

OAKS that once waved to the sky
In his wicker kishes lie,
Seeded ere King Conor's birth
To warm my little house of earth.
But the fiend Mortality
Touches all things with decay.
Soon the turf-man and his ass
Like the green forest will pass,
Branch on branch and stem on stem.
Soon, like Conor's diadem—
The red carbuncle in his crown—
My fire will sink and settle down,
And I, the poet, old and poor,
Be left wondering at Death's door.

THE WHELK-GATHERER

WHELKS from the white sea,
The sea-field of Lir,
What life has touched you ?
What storm, what vastness ?

Creek to sea-loch,
And sea-loch to ocean
Are brothers.
What rumours have cried to you
From the Beyond ?

Where the dim sea-line
Is a wheel unbroken ;
Where day dawns on water,
And night falls on wind,
And the fluid elements
Quarrel for ever.

Where sometimes the sun
Looks hotly down on you,
And sometimes the moon,
And the ice-cold stars.

Where no ship sailed of man
Comes ever to trouble you ;
Only the nautilus' fluttering
pennant,
Only the petrel's peak of silver,

Only the whale's hulk, only the
dolphin's,
Only the derelict—black and
deserted.

And you ?
You, poor woman,
Swathed in thick shawls,
Wet and staggering
Under your burden,
Have sailed seas all as strange.

Such life has touched you,
Such storm, such vastness,
Such rumours have cried to you
From the Beyond.

THE WISE-WOMAN

FIELDS of corn lay water logged
Mountain gullies roared in flood,
Thatches leaked, and cattle bogged
Dewlap-deep in oozy mud.
Granny Bush from her front door
Prayed the skies to rain no more.

But the gods that rule the rain
Turned a bothered ear, and fell
Straight into their dreams again
At the head of Connla's Well—
Spouting from a sky of grey
Half a night and half a day.

Were their hearts not dead in dreams
They would bid the rain be done,
Dry the thatches, still the streams,
Lift the cornlands to the sun.
Granny then might sup her brew
In a tent of green and blue.

THE RAGMAN

RATTLE, rattle over the stones,
Rags and bones, rags and bones ;
Blue balloons, and a dirty old man
Who never was washed since time began.

Round and round, and to and fro,
And up and down the whirligigs go ;
And the blue-skinned bubbles fuss and fret
For lack of room in the ragman's net.

PRIESTS

I

WHEN he goes thin in leaky shoes
For lack of meat and marriage dues
Two moons will kindle in the sky,
And drink the deep Atlantic dry.

He built a chapel on a hill,
And let the peasants foot the bill.
When Dagda cracks its steeple down
The rooted oaks will come to town.

II

Walking the road between grey, lichenized walls
To where the sick man or the sinner calls,
You tread the path that Paul and Jerome trod,
Dispenser of the mysteries of God.

The scholarship you know, the Latin, Greek,
The books you write, the shining words you speak,
Your silvered hair, your shaven face, your dress
Are but as shadows of your holiness.

I do not judge you, any more than I
Have judged another ; but with Wisdom's eye
I look, and count you worthy of high song
Who lift the fallen, bid the weak be strong.

III

Christ drank the wine of love-feasts,
Christ broke the leper's bread ;
Christ let a fallen woman
Pour spikenard on his head.

You put a mask on beauty,
You bind the dancers' feet ;
You bless the sad and bitter,
And curse the gay and sweet.

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

GRUMLY ploughed his field, she said,
Upon the threshold of day;
And the sun rose up in a cloud of fire
Over the hills away.

And two white doves came down, she said,
And bathed in the mearing spring,
And Grumly reined his horses in
To watch so strange a thing.

Grumly ploughed his field, she said,
Upon the heel of day;
And the sun sank down in a cloud of fire
Over the hills away.

And the two white doves came down, she said,
And bathed in the mearing spring;
And Grumly took a jack-stone up,
And did a murderous thing. . . .

It is many a year ago, she said,
And Grumly's field is mine:
He ploughs the Meadow of the Dead
Where sun will never shine.

But still the water runs, she said,
And still the spring is blest;
And daylight whitens in the east
And reddens in the west.

THE EMIGRANT

THE car is yoked before the door,
And time will let us dance no more.
Come, fiddler, now, and play for me
“Farewell to barn and stack and tree.”

To-day the fields looked wet and cold,
The mearings gapped, the cattle old.
Things are not what they used to be—
“Farewell to barn and stack and tree.”

I go, without the heart to go,
To kindred that I hardly know.
Drink, neighbour, drink a health with me—
“Farewell to barn and stack and tree.”

Five hours will see me stowed aboard,
The gang-plank up, the ship unmoored.
Christ grant no tempest shakes the sea—
“Farewell to barn and stack and tree.”

THE EXILE

HILLS of heather, fields of stones,
And the hungry sea that moans
Endlessly beyond them: they
Hold my heart till Judgment Day.

Home is heaven, tho' it were
A burrow in the rock of Clare:
And Clare is seventh heaven to me,
Hanging on the hungry sea.

THE YOUNG GIRL

THE foxglove's purple tongue,
The stony pool
That doubles earth and sky
Can never die.
The fields are beautiful,
And you are young.

Over the haggard gate
Creeps the red moon :
Apple and acorn now
Drop from the bough.
The golden fields will soon
Be desolate.

The plougher turns the mould :
Shadowed and cool,
The primrose makes of spring
A star-lit thing.
The fields are beautiful,
And you are old.

THE OLD AGE PENSIONER

HE sits over the glimmering coal
With ancient face and folded hands:
His eye glasses his quiet soul,
He blinks and nods and understands.
In dew wetted, in tempest blown,
A Lear at last come to his own.

For fifty years he trenched his field
That he might eat a freeman's bread :
The seasons balked him of their yield,
His children's children wished him dead.
But ransom came to him at length
At the ebb-tide of life and strength.

And so he sits with folded hands
Over the flag of amber fire :
He blinks and nods and understands,
He has his very soul's desire.
In dew wetted, in tempest blown,
A Lear at last come to his own.

THE NORTHERN FARMER

OH, is there wool for weaving,
And is there corn for bread ?
And is the child of man alive,
Or is it pale and dead ?

Tell me, you Northern Farmer,
That count your bag of gold :
The coins were minted yesterday,
But life is very old.

Your farmstead walls are shining
With fragrant lime and tar :
But Beauty sits upon a cloud,
And beckons from a star.

And Wisdom lives in ploughing,
And Wonder in a birth :
The yellow god you worship is
No stronger than the earth.

Oh, is there wool for weaving,
And is there corn for bread ?
And is the child of man alive,
Or is it pale and dead ?

Tell me, you Northern Farmer,
That count your bag of gold :
The coins were minted yesterday,
But life is very old.

THE ROAD-MAKER

Road-maker!—what other name
Matches thee, O soul of flame?
Father, to whose passion I
Owe my place in destiny.

Did thy knowledge plan the way,
Fix the levels, trench the clay,
Blast the rock and roll the stone
That my feet have travelled on ?

I am hardly of the trade
Thou and thy forefathers made
Epic by your ancient skill,
Intellect and iron will.

Yet by that I have from thee—
Prescience and poetry—
I make roads for feet to tread
To the wonders overhead.

THE ROAD-MENDER

LIFE goes by, slowly by :
Clouds, like sheep flocks, in the sky,
Tinkers, following for gain
The ancient craft of Tubal Cain,
Red leaves whirled from autumn woods
Summer shadows, winter floods,
Drovers, trampers, men in carts
From the two-and-thirty arts,
Dawns that blossom, dusks that die—
All go by, slowly by.

Only you, that mend the roads,
Move not with the horses' loads,
Travel not with dusty feet
From mountain farm to city street.
Life goes by you, and you feel
All the racket of the wheel ;
Time flies past you, and you see
All its love and misery,
Stirring hardly from your place—
A needle-point in boundless space.

THE BONE-SETTER

The Quarryman tells of his Powers

N^{ow} may a red stone choke me,
If what I say's a lie !
He set my arm as square
As if it wasn't broke ;
And broke it was, sir, *there*,
Most cruelly.
Broke half athwart,
With a jagged edge, like a spar.
Slinging flags, it was, from Cronan's cart
Into the little barque moored aft the bar
At Donegrogue.
And here I am, as game a rogue
As ever wore out shoe-leather ;
And I'll be seventy soon.
Ay, without ache or pain at all,
Saving a stoon, at times, of the rheumatism
In wet or frosty weather.

D'you see that lime-washed house beyond ?
This side the quarry head,
The dormers painted red.
It's his.
As snug as a haggard mouse
He lives there.
Marry? God, not he!
He's not the marrying sort, I tell you.

Many a blood you'd think would court
Has never crossed a maid.

Wed he is to his trade—

And that's my own (God spare me!),
Quarrying stone.

But he's a rich man, sir,

And I'm a poor.

For, sure, the quarries on the bluff are his,
The house you see, the farm,
And money and stuff besides.

Flowing on him, faith, in spring tides
The money is.

And me ?

I've three to feed on seven bob a week:
Herself, and Marcus Blake, her father—
Galway breed :

A done old man,

Tho' he's the pension now,
And that comes handy.

Ah, God knows it does !

Well, Jerry Landy broke his leg—
You know him, boss? *Young Jerry*—
Fair across the shin bone.

Getting stone ? No.

Stacking ? No.

Loading ? God, not he
Hurling he was a' Sunday,

And that's not Chriskin—
Ah, God knows it isn't!
Well, a' Monday it was set,
And he in bed
Whistling "*The Wife of the Red-Haired Man*"—
As well as ever he was.
Who set it?
Him, to be sure. Who else?
For a fractured limb,
Or wrench, or strain,
There's not his like
'Twixt Burren and Bodyke.
Biddy Early and her herbs was good,
But, faith, he's better.
A cunning pull, a push, two splints of wood,
Cotton to lap it round,
No letter, like what the doctor gives you,
And no draught to poison you—
That's his craft, no more.
And it's for the poor—
Old women and old men, like me—
He practises;
And foolish cubs, d'you see,
Would get a fall
At pucking ball, or wrestling,
Or breaking a young horse.
And, of course, the goose-seam's free!
God bless us all and keep us—
Him, the master, you, my friend, and me.

THE SCHOLAR

WHICH is the wiser thing ?
To let no flower of spring
Pass by, to fill ourselves with wine
And precious ointments, with the vine
And rose to bind our head
Before the leaves are witheréd.
Or to be counted fools
With those who haunt the schools
Of Poetry, to have it told—
He lived, despising gold
But loving Knowledge. There !
His breath is others' air.
He's dead ; dead as the wet clay
Is dead ; dead with too short a day,
His name a byword.—

From “*Apocrypha*”

The scholar glanced. He sat upon a ditch
In the open sun, close to a pine-wood. Which
Is the wiser thing ? he said.
A pine-cone fell. The silence answeréd.

THE PROPHET

“‘ **O**UT of the violent stream
A green field.’ So
Will Ireland grow
Out of her bloody dream.”—

The old man spoke
In Gaelic, this and no more.
His age might be four-score
And ten ; his body broke,
But not his spirit. Round
Him the hill wood
Roared ; a stream in flood
Channelled the ground ;
And high in air
The *gandal colais* cried.
What matter if the rocks replied,
“ None listen. Night is everywhere ! ”

THE TINKERS

BRAZENLY he passes gap and gate,
A pace in front of her he calls his mate.

Drunk and battered, she, with a little eye,
She hitches up her tins and totters by.

No floor has she to sweep, no clan to care,
No cloths to spread and bleach in the open air.

No yoke has he, no plough to call his own,
No lambing-fold, no barn of lime-washed stone.

No corn to lodge and rot when the rain falls :
His strolling tinker's soul is free of walls.

The hill gods are theirs, from rock and pine :
The hearth gods, the valley gods are mine.

THE WEAVER'S FAMILY

THE door lay open, and I walked in : I could hear
the clack of a loom

And the thin sound of a woman's voice singing
within the room.

I blessed the house, and the singer blushed redly
with surprise :

A tall woman with ripe breasts and Spanish hair
and eyes.

She rose shyly from the hearth and stopped her
warping-wheel,

And three children hid in her skirts, scared from
their evening meal.

"*Tar isteach*," she murmured in the only language
she knew,

The Irish that's as old as earth and young as the
living dew.

I asked her could she show me the path over the
hill :

I'd lost my way in the red bog tramping from
Columbkill.

"*Feadaim*," and she spoke a word into the inner
room,

And a man came out in his bare feet, and the clack
stopped in the loom.

He put me on the right path, and the woman with
feet of silk

Went softly to the dresser and brought me a bowl
of milk.

The grey sky drifted above, the sea whitened
below,
And the boulder stones on Maghery strand looked as
white as snow.

THE HORSE-BREAKER

A GOOD nag knows the sinewy grip
That rides him without spur or whip,—
And Bat Muldowney knows his mind.
Here's at you, Bat! I love your kind :
The clean-jawed man with fearless eyes :
Yourself as worthy of a prize
As what you break. To-day I spied
Him cantering by the Anner side,
And "Christ!" says I, "but there's a man,
And there's a horse." Bat lightly ran
The chaser round with hand and knee,
Keeping him at a jump; till he,
Weary of dyke, of post and rail,
Showed temper, jibbed, stood on his tail,
And, if he could, would throw Bat. No,
By Christ! Good nags have got to go
Where good men ride them. At the sticks
Bat faces him again. He kicks,
As Irish blood will kick, head down ;
But all the horses, bay and brown,
Were they to plunge till Judgment Day,
Could not put Bartle off his way.
"Woa, beauty. Up!" . . . and at one stride
The chaser's found the other side.
For good nags know the sinewy grip
That rides them without spur or whip,—
And Bat Muldowney knows his mind.
Here's at you, Bat! I love your kind.

THE UNFROCKED PRIEST

HE leant at the door
In his priest's clothes—
Greasy black they were :
And he bled at the nose.

He leant at the door,
And the blood trickled down :
A man of the country,
More than the town.

He was of God's anointed,
A priest, no less :
But he had been unfrocked
For drunkenness.

For that, or worse—
And flesh is only human—
For some wrong-doing
With a woman.

And in his father's house
He lived at ease,
Reading his books,
As quiet as the trees.

No one troubled him
As he went in and out,
And he smoked his clay,
And he grew stout.

And he tramped the parish
In the summer days,
Thinking high thoughts
And giving God praise.

None but blessed him
As he walked the hills,
For he gave to the poor
And he cured their ills.

There was no herb
That grew in the grass,
But he saw its virtue
As in a glass.

No rath, no Mass-bush,
No ogham stone,
But he knew its story
As his own.

He had a scholar's knowledge
Of Greek,
And dabbled in Hebrew
And Arabic.

And in his time
(He died in 'Eighty-Seven)
He wrote two epics
And a "Dream of Heaven."

I saw him once only
In his priest's clothes,
At his father's door:
And he bled at the nose.

THE JOHN'S-FIRE DANCERS

INTO the windless twilight
Of dark and starry fire
A cloudy pillar rises,
Red as young desire.

A cloudy pillar rises,
Red with breaking flame,
High above the mountain
That owns the fairy name.

I do not hear the music,
Or see the dancers' feet;
But the cairn is burning, burning,
And the star-fire is sweet.

And hearts, I know, are dancing
Hot with young desire
On the grassy mountain,
Round the cloudy fire.

THE ANTIQUARY

IF you would learn
The why and wherefore of a "quern,"
A "kistvaen" or a "reliquary,"
You've but to ask the Antiquary.
He'll tell you that, and lashings more
Of history, and the oral lore
He's taken down from peasants' lips
Who never heard of manuscripts.
As who, for instance, might have thrown
Yon butterlump of basalt stone
That balks the wind of Moran's crop
So slickly from the mountain top.
Or what it is that rings the bell
On certain fasts in Grumly's Well :
A fish, maybe, a sacred trout,
Or virtue dropping from the clout
Some ulcered beggar left behind
To thank his God he is not blind.

Collector, too, and lapidary
As well as Irish antiquary,
His house, the last one in the town
With the brass vane, is coming down
With odds and ends of ancientry
Picked up from Cove to Murloch Bay.—
A hafted pike that killed its man
In 'Ninety-Eight; a copper pan

The Fianna used, and hazel spits
With charred ends from their cooking pits ;
A Danish cup ; a crucible
Found at the foot of Cullan's hill,
And likely used by him of old
For melting findruiney and gold ;
A Jacobean sword ; a ball
Shot from a gun on Derry's Wall ;
A string of cinerary urns ;
A ballad thumbed by Jamey Burns,
The Antrim yeoman ; amethysts
From Achill ; anchors, treasure chests
Recovered from a Spanish wreck
(The Great Armada !) centuries back ;
A murrain charm ; a Georgian "snuff,"
And such like age-embrownéd stuff.

Not that the crust on sword or scroll
Has touched the freshness of his soul.
An airy man ; his eager mind
Stretching into the dark behind,
And forward ; young as fallen dew,
And yet as old as Ireland, too.

THE PLANTER

THE Celt, I say,
Has shown some artistry
In living ; you, the Planter, none.
Under moon or sun
You are the same, a dull dog, countryless,
Traditionless and letterless ;
Without a dance or song
To speed the time along ;
Without a hint of who the Maker was
Who named your farm, or who
Lifted the cromleac in the twisted haws
Marching your barley-field. No clue
Is deigned you. The grey past is dead
For you, as Beauty is. Your head
Is but a block, your filmed eye
Blind to the vision and the mystery
Of Man's progression thro' the Northern Land
Since the first Niall threw the Bloody Hand.

THE PÚCA

THE Púca's come again,
Who long was hid away
In cave or twilight glen :
Too shy, too proud to play
Under the eye of day.

I saw him dance and skip
But now in the beech wood,
Wild rhymes upon his lip
And laughter in his blood.
I envied him his grip
Upon the sunny mood.

Then altered he his note
To one of weariness :
He shook his hairy coat,
The double of distress,
And cried deep in his throat
For gall and bitterness.

The Púca's gone again
To sleep his wits away
In cave or twilight glen :
Too shy, too proud to stay
Under the eye of day.

THE STONE-CUTTER

THE field is ploughed, the sand is drawn,
The stone is quarried from the rock:
The man returns in scarlet drink,
The woman gets her burial-knock.

And far above the white clouds drift,
And far below the land is spread
In beauty to the heavens' edge,
Oblivious of the murdered dead.

THE MILK-BOY

MILK is of the sun,
The fallen dew, the wind :
A spring in country fields,
White and kind.

Beer is of the town,
The bar, the lighted street :
Beer's a bitter draught,
Milk is sweet.

On your face I see
Sunburn, more or less :
Beauty, and the bloom
Of wickedness.

Cobblestones and grass
In your voice I hear :
Cans of foaming milk
And black beer !

THE MAN AND THE MARSH-MALLOWS

WELL, look at . . . here !
Marsh-mallows is a lucky thing.
Sorrow a fear
I have of colonel or king,
Or tramp or thief.
The garden's safe
If e'er a leaf
Of it's about the wall.
I fear nothing at all,
I tell you, nothing.
And I'm not a gallows man :
No rather, a fidgety man,
A nervous man.
I ran—
You'll think it strange—
Two miles almost
From what I thought a ghost
At Lamb Doyle's, there,
Last Tuesday was a year ;
Treading on air,
And never stopped for wind—
It's not a boast—
Till nearly Harold's Grange.
But, look at . . . here !
With just a leaf
Of that, a weeny leaf—
And never fear—
The garden's safe,
The haggard's safe,
The house is safe.

THE ARAN ISLANDER

HE lifts his pint in a tavern on the quay of
Galway town,
And with a health to the company he drinks it
slowly down.
Strange faces hulk about the bar, wreathed in
tobacco-smoke :
The seaman with his smutty song, the farmer with
his joke,
Dealers and drovers from the fair in town-bought
wideawakes,
Coasters, who know the feel of oars better than
slanes and rakes—
Dark-featured men, of rougher build, and bred on
larger ground.
His pewter rattles on the board, the treat again goes
round.
And what cares he, tho' the autumn dark begins to
drop outside,
And the treacherous and flukey wind flaws round to
meet the tide ?
He's crossed that narrow stretch of sea as often as
his days,
And lived to drink his Christian drop and give his
Maker praise.
O sea with the grey curling verge, O green and
hungry sea,
Your bottom knows the whitening bones of stronger
men than he !

THE PHILOSOPHER

I

THERE's terror in the wind !
Grey and blind
The storm passes.
Blown rocks, whitening sea,
The pines bent like grasses
Frighten me.

It goes :
The rain is done,
And lo, a rose
Reddens in the sun.
Tho' God is terrible in cloud and
wind,
In sun and leaves He's kind.

II

The green was, the brown is :
But in the rain
The green will come again.

The road climbs to the sky :
The blue hills brood,
The fern is red as blood.

Thro' white mist the green falls,
Brown and gold,
Into the quiet mould.

But it will live with spring :
Earth is wise,
Nothing dies.

THE GLEANERS

INTO the gathered cornlands
The moon comes red and round;
The night-bee passes
With a low, humming sound.

Two shadowy figures move,
Like ancient kings
Searching the fields
For golden, buried things.

On the silent shore
The dark tide drowses;
Night, like a dream,
Lies over the farm-houses.

The wind barely stirs
The dew-heavy fern;
The fox is quiet
In the cairn.

Sleep claims tilth and hill-land
And the unknown sky,
Where the gay Northern Lights
Pale now and die.

Pale now and die,
As the red moon pales—
Whitening, dwindling
The higher it sails.

POETS

I

BLACK-LETTER books on Heaven, Hell
And Purgatory he studied well;
Knew Hermes' elements by heart,
And mastered Galen's secret art;
Transmuted ugly things and old
To visions of the Age of Gold;
Saw white queens dancing on the floor
Where toads and lepers crawled before;
Heard fairies singing at high noon
The marriage of the sun and moon;
And ravished with a virgin hand
The mystery of Ireland.

Alas ! not all his wit could keep
Him from the grey and fatal steep
Of lien on the treasury
Of Freedom's ancient enemy.
He died with chains about his mind,
Who plumb'd the sea, who scaled the wind.

II

A dark-haired man, not young, not old,
Cast in a light-weight boxer's mould,
With supple arm and body curves,—
And yet a thing compact of nerves.

Proud as a fallen god, and shy,
The Spirit kindles in his eye;
And swift-winged Thought is plain to trace
In every movement of his face.

Robust in that, as in his bone,
With here and there an undertone
Of woman's nature threading it—
The male and female truly knit.

Body and spirit, sun and moon,
Archangel now and devil soon,
The windy moods sway him about—
A bubble in the whirling rout.

What he might be, were Fortune kind,
And he were of a constant mind,
A prophet born would hardly say
Between to-day and Judgment Day.

Dan Chaucer dreamed, and died in bed
With laurels on his reverend head,
And Chatterton went to the grave,
A frenzied child, and none to save.

Enough if Thought and Will are true
To one star flaming in the blue:
Iron is silver to the bard,
And Poetry its own reward.

THE ORANGEMAN

A GINGER-FACED man
With a walrus moustache
His eyes, like his soul,
Of the colour of ash

With the fire gone out of it :
Breaking to flame
Of a sulphurous glare
At the touch of the name

William. For Billy
Of Orange, he knows,
Saved him and his seed
From the devil's own woes !

His faith, 'Sixteen-Ninety ;
His love, none ; his hope,
That hell may one day
Get the soul of the Pope.

Damnation writ large
On the walls of his home—
Red brick in a back street :
While the Ogre of Rome

Lives in beauty, with Venus
And Psyche in white,
And the Trojan Laocoön
For his spirit's delight.

Not that the æsthete
In him is dumb :
There's the flap of his banner,
The tap of his drum.

Straussian discords,
For peace, and—revolt ?
The crash of the paver,
The crack of the bolt.

A monster ! Not quite,
As you guess from my song ;
But clay marred in the mixing,—
God's image gone wrong.

THE MILL-GIRL

GEHENNA's stones have ground
The redness from her cheek,
The beauty from her eye.
The hills are shut to her,
The unsullied grass,
The racing cloud ;
And like an outcast thing
She passes by,
Hiding her travail
In a shawl.

THE PIPER

GEORGE BORROW in his "*Lavengro*"
Tells us of a Welshman, who
By some excess of mother-wit
Framed a harp and played on it,
Built a ship and sailed to sea,
And steered it home to melody
Of his own making. I, indeed,
Might write for every man to read
An *Odyssey* of wonderment
More wonderful, but rest content
With celebrating one I knew
Who built his pipes, and played them, too :
No more.

Ah, played ! Therein is all :
The hounded thing, the hunter's call ;
The shudder, when the quarry's breath
Is drowned in blood and stilled in death ;
The marriage dance, the pulsing vein,
The kiss that must be given again ;
The hope that Ireland, like a rose,
Sees shining thro' her tale of woes ;
The battle lost, the long lament
For blood and spirit vainly spent ;
And so on, thro' the varying scale
Of passion that the western Gael
Knows, and by miracle of art
Draws to the chanter from the heart

Like water from a hidden spring,
To leap or murmur, weep or sing.

I see him now, a little man
In proper black, whey-bearded, wan,
With eyes that scan the eastern hills
Thro' thick, gold-rimmed spectacles.
His hand is on the chanter. Lo,
The hidden spring begins to flow
In waves of magic. (He is dead
These seven years, but bend your head
And listen). Rising from the clay,
The Master plays "*The Ring of Day*."
It mounts and falls and floats away
Over the sky-line then is gone
Into the silence of the Dawn.

THE MIDWIFE

A CAR will go for Essy, but will not fetch her back :

And from the Cooley Mountains it is a windy track,
A woman's taken in labour between the night and day :

And God is in His heaven, but heaven's far away.
And so the cry is, "Essy!" and "Let the midwife come :

We'll send a car for Essy, but none to fetch her home."

She's started on her journey up thro' the windy air,
And to the heavy woman she brings a woman's care.
A man-child is delivered upon the stroke of two :
The caul is kept for fortune, and Essy takes her due—

A brand new two-and-sixpence, and such food as is spread :

And on the mare that's Shanks's she jogs back to her bed.

Boys grow to men and marry, and till their bit of ground :

And women bear them children, and so the world goes round.

THE MAN-CHILD

IN the patterned stars of night,
In high daylight,
In the lift of spring,
In love and travailing,
In cast seed and heavy corn
You were born,
Man-child,
That came to me
Nakedly
From the unknown wild.

Potentialities
Sleep in you.
The black and twisted trees,
The delicate web of blue
That veils the hills,
The brown water that spills
Over the rock,
The grey burial-stones,
The green and springing wood
Come of a stock
No older than your bones,
No younger than your blood.

Eber's battle-shout
Is strong
In you; Amergin's primal song
Folds you round about;

The lost mysteries
Brood in your young eyes;
And in that little hand
Of yours the wine of Ireland—
The dark and fragrant wine
Of nationhood divine—
Is held as in a cup
For unborn mouths to sup.

THE PROFESSOR

The Poet speaks of him from the Stars

I WROTE it with my blood
In light, in darkness both
Of body and soul. There stood
Against me legions, loath
To praise and swift to blame.
My bread was gall, my name
A byword. None but scoffed
At me, when hats were doffed
To gownéd fools. I went
Into the firmament
Upon a starless night—
(The moon had hid her light)—
A heretic ; and lo,
A black cloud crept below
Upon the earth. I saw
It spread, and crowds with awe
Look up at me: no more
A dreamer starved and poor,
But set a shining star
Of knowledge in the sky,
To light men's souls thereby.
Now from the Seraphs' Stair
I watch you in your chair,
Professing me—for gold—
Who never bought or sold.

THE NEWSPAPER-SELLER

(*Times Square, New York, about two o'clock on a winter's morning.*)

AND how is Cabey's Lane ?
I'm forty years left Ennis, sir,
And never like to see the place again.
'Twas out of there I married her—
The first one—Mattha Twomey's daughter.
The "bit o' paint," they called her.
She was young, tall as a birch-tree, pale,
With blushes in her cheeks,
And eyes as brown as Burren water.
Faith, and there was lavish drinking
At her wedding. Now, as I'm thinking—
Four half-barrels of ale,
Old whisky, cordial and wine ;
And eating fine.

I'd ten by her :
Ten topping childer, sir,
Like apples, red and sweet.
In fair-meadow or street
You wouldn't see the likes of 'em
And then she died.

You can't live by the dead,
Leastways, when you have hungry mouths to fill
That's what my people said.

And so inside a year I wed again—
This time, to Mary Quill,
A Limerick girl was lodging in the lane
West of Cabey's. The first was quiet and wise,
The second had laughing eyes :
I put a charm on them, and married her.

Says she on the wedding night,
“ You're in a sorry plight
With me and the little ones. Let's go away.”
“ Where to ? ” says I. “ To America,”
Says she. “ This country is too poor and small
For us, and over there there's work and bread
for all.”

She was an eager kind, you see—
Far different to Sibby.
Well, by dint of slaving night and day
We made the passage out, and Boston Quay
Saw me and her in Eighteen Seventy-Three,
The Blizzard Year. That's four decades ago ;
But even now I feel the bitter snow—
I feel it in my marrow, sir—the snow
And the high, driving wind.
We left our clan behind
In Cabey's Lane with neighbours
Till such times as I could find
The cash to fetch 'em after us.

And God was kind—
Kinder than I thought He'd be
In a strange land.
For work came rolling to my hand, sir,
And I wrought for constant pay
In a bakehouse. He was German, sir,
The boss ; and Germans, mostly, mixed the
dough,
And watched the fires. That's how I came to
know
The Deutsch. I speak it better than I used to do
The Gaelic at home.

I'd twelve by Mary, sir—
Ten living and two dead.
I'd ten by Sibby. Twenty childer, sir—
Twelve daughters and eight sons
And better for myself I ne'er had one !

My curse on Matt and Ned
That let old age come down on my grey head,
And left me selling “Worlds” !
My curse on Shaun !
My curse on Meehaul Ban,
The fair-haired boy, the gentleman,
That wouldn't look the road I doddered on !
My seven curses on him,

And the flaming curse of God !

My curse on Peter !

My blessing on poor Joe, who's now in quod
For housebreaking—the white lamb of the flock
He helped me when my right hand was a crock
With blood-poison, and paid the rent for me.

My curse on all my daughters !

On Sibby Ann, who's married west,

And has her auto, while I creep on limbs
All crookened with the pains !

My curse on Peg and Fan !

My curse on Angeline !

My curse on Ceely, and the rest !

I don't know half their names :

The devil's brood, but no brood of mine.

And Cabey's Lane, sir ? I was happy there,

In Ennis town in Clare,

When I was young. Ah, young, not old

God help us, isn't it bitter cold !

THE JOURNEYMAN WEAVER

BEAM and shuttle seem to know
His inner thoughts, and softly flow
Backward, forward, to and fro.

West thread fast and warp thread slow,
White thread joy and black thread woe,
Backward, forward, to and fro.

Things and shadows darker grow ;
Daylight flickers to and fro,
Backward, forward, to and fro.

Outside the horns of winter blow,
Journeyman, 'tis time to go !
Backward, forward, to and fro.

Death . . . his hand is cold as snow
Quench the ashes, keen him low,
Backward, forward, to and fro.

THE PIG-KILLER

ONE would not think so meek a man,
With eyes so round, with skin so white,
Would shed the blood of anything,
And walk the roads in broad daylight.

Yet in the blackness of his coat
He hides a case of shining knives
That, for a common English piece,
Have slit the thread of many lives.

The gelded brawn may kick and squeal,
The bonham wriggle, dumb and blind,
But Packey spits and pulls a wisp,
And wipes his hands, and does not mind.

They say that murder ever cries
For vengeance on the slayer's head ;
But Morrígu, I fear, must wait
For Packey Byrne till he is dead.

THE COUNTRY SWEEP

An early snow had covered
The hills with white :
He went by in the sunrise,
As black as night.

His face, his brush, his body
As black as night,
Against the snowy uplands
And dancing light.

How inky black the devil
Would look, were he
Abroad on such a morning
With his forked tree !

GHOSTS

THE nettle chokes the beaten earth,
The ivy-tree the stone.—
The living dead must mind
The walls that were their own.

The living dead must surely mind
The constant stream that spills
Into a granite pool
Between the folding hills.

It twists about, it trickles thro',
And with a hollow sound
It spills into the pool,
And gurgles underground.

Last night, last night, as I came by
The ruins grey and bare,
I heard a human voice
Make music on the air.

For tho' the nettle chokes the earth,
The ivy-tree the stone,
The living dead must mind
The walls that were their own.

I looked, and lo, the driven moon
Hid in a bank of cloud;
And when it shone I saw
A woman in her shroud.

She sang, and washed a wooden churn
All in the water white :
Her hair was in the stream,
Her shroud was spun of light.

She washed, and coloured bubbles foamed
About her fallen hair ;
And human laughter rang
Into the icy air.

It seemed the pool was white with feet,
The darkness bright with eyes,
The ruins warm with song,
With laughter and with sighs.

For tho' the nettle chokes the earth,
The ivy-tree the stone,
The living dead must mind
The walls that were their own.

THE OSIER-SELLERS

IN the long sun-shadows
They went the mountain road :
A blind man and his son,
And two asses with their load.

Fresh green river osiers,
Sweeping the frosty ground :
The four barths and straw tackle
Worth, maybe, a pound.

Not that gold would buy
The osiers or the straw ;
For one grows by man's cunning,
The other by God's law.

Nor that order outweighs
The strange beauty they made :
The two men and their beasts
Following an ancient trade.

In the long moon-shadows
They will come again :
Sober like decent Irish,
Or drunk with their gain.

THE OLD WOMAN

As a white candle
In a holy place,
So is the beauty
Of an agéd face.

As the spent radiance
Of the winter sun,
So is a woman
With her travail done.

Her brood gone from her,
And her thoughts as still
As the waters
Under a ruined mill.

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